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Biog.



James Theodore  
Holly  
in Haiti

by William L. Wipfler

BUILDERS for CHRIST

JAMES THEODORE HOLLY IN HAITI

BY WILLIAM L. WIPFLER



*This pamphlet is one of a series of biographies of Builders for Christ edited by THE REV. POWEL MILLS DAWLEY, PH.D. Each pamphlet presents a glimpse into the life and work of a Christian who has responded to the call to a missionary vocation. The series covers a wide range of people, times, and places. All are of special interest and concern to Episcopalians. The general editor, Dr. Dawley, is Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the General Theological Seminary, New York, and the author of two volumes in the Church's Teaching series, Chapters in Church History and The Episcopal Church and Its Work.*

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*Price 25 Cents*

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL

281 FOURTH AVENUE

New York 10, N. Y.

1956



JAMES THEODORE HOLLY  
*First Missionary Bishop of Haiti, 1874-1911*

## Prayers

**B**LESSED Lord we beseech thee to pour out thy Holy Spirit upon thy Church in Haiti, that she may stand fast in the faith, and that through her the people may learn to know and love thee, their Saviour, whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost we worship as one God, world without end. *Amen.*

**O** GOD of the nations, we ask thy blessing upon thy people of all lands. Bless those who labor for the upbuilding of thy Kingdom, that in the spirit of love and power they may lead men out of darkness into the light of thy truth; and grant, O Lord, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety may be established among us for all generations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

**A**LMIGHTY God, who didst enkindle the flame of thy love in the heart of thy servant James Theodore Holly; grant unto us thy humble servants, the same faith, courage, and devotion to duty; that, as we remember his work, we may lay our hearts open to thy call; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

# Holly in Haiti

by WILLIAM L. WIPFLER

I HAVE been into some of their wild regions on the plains near Port-au-Prince, where I felt myself, like Dr. Livingstone, in the very heart of Africa. There were the same mud cottages, the same thatched dwellings of the black tribes just as you have seen presented in Dr. Livingstone's travels. And from the dark entrances of these huts the half naked creatures would look out upon us, then dart away again, suggesting always that they were simply savages. . . . For twelve miles I travelled through a deep forest, almost impenetrable. . . . I was forcibly reminded of that wild, dreary, wicked appearance which Dante gives to the *Inferno*."

## RECOGNITION AS AN INDEPENDENT CHURCH

THIS picture of Haiti was painted in 1873 by the Rt. Rev. Arthur C. Coxe, Bishop of Western New York, who had been sent to make a visitation of the work of the Episcopal Church there. By that time the Church had been hard at her task for twelve years. The labor had been rewarding, however, and in the same year 1873 the Convocation of the Church in Haiti felt strong enough to ask for recognition as an independent Church of the Anglican Communion.

The young Church had grown up in the environment that Bishop Coxe described so vividly. In a land that seemed to resemble the heart of darkest Africa a small band of Christians had sought to build a Church. Spurred on by a firm and courageous faith, they succeeded in setting the roots of the Episcopal Church deep in the soil of Haiti, and the strong body of the faithful that is to be found there today bears witness to their labors. But any saga of a devoted people usually includes the story of a strong and inspiring leader, and the Church in Haiti is no exception. The history of its first fifty years is virtually the biography of its founder and first bishop, James Theodore Holly.

#### A YOUNG PRIEST GOES TO HAITI

IN May, 1861 a young priest of the Episcopal Church embarked on an undertaking that had been his chief desire for a half dozen years. He was James Theodore Holly, and his ambition was to lead a group of American Negroes to Haiti where they might establish a home. Holly had visited Haiti in July, 1855 to collect useful information for the Foreign Committee of the Episcopal Church which was considering the opening of a mission there. At the same time he had become involved in the program of the National Emigration Convention of Colored Men, where he had advocated the choice of Haiti as a place of removal for those Negroes who sought freedom and self-government. His interest, therefore, was not simply that of a chaplain to a band of emigrants, but also that of a zealous young man who saw in this venture a golden opportunity for both his Church and his people.

James Theodore Holly was born in Washington,

D. C., of free Negro parents, on October 3, 1829. As his family was Roman Catholic, his early years were spent in that Church. There he was baptized, confirmed, and made his first communion. But even though he had begun to feel a sense of vocation to the ministry, his allegiance to Roman Catholicism was not destined to be permanent. Gradually through his own study he came more and more to criticize what he felt to be the "unscriptural ways of that Church," and at the age of twenty-two ceased to be a Roman Catholic. It was not long before he found his way into the Episcopal Church to which he was to give almost sixty years of devoted and untiring service, first as a priest and missionary, then as a bishop.

In a letter which he later wrote to John Henry Hopkins, Bishop of Vermont, he described his conversion to the Episcopal Church as arising out of a "protest against the mind-enslaving and soul-crushing system of unscrupulous domination" of the Roman Church, and his "awakening to the catholicity of the Protestant Episcopal Church." After his renunciation of Roman Catholicism in 1852, Holly sought to fulfill his vocation to the ministry. Within a year he was admitted a candidate for Holy Orders, and two years later he was made a deacon by Bishop McCoskry of Michigan. Shortly afterwards he was advanced to the priesthood by the Assistant Bishop of Connecticut.

In seeking ordination Holly had made it clear to Bishop McCoskry that it was with the express purpose of becoming a missionary to Haiti. Bishop McCoskry heartily approved, and shortly after ordination Holly went to New York armed with a letter of recommendation to the Foreign Committee. Dr. Gregory Thur-

ston Bedell received him, and consented to bring the matter before the Committee. Results were rapidly forthcoming. The ambitious young man was commissioned "to visit Haiti and collect information as to what opening was there presented for the establishment of a mission of the Church." From July to September of 1855 was spent in this project, and Holly returned with an encouraging report which elicited the promise that he would be sent as a missionary to Haiti as soon as funds became available.

At the triennial meeting of the Board of Missions in 1859 Haiti was singled out for serious consideration as one of the fields having a claim on the Church for missionary work. Holly's goal was coming closer, and beginning late in 1855 "the next six years were spent in gaining pastoral experience for the work in view." In addition to the active ministry he carried on as rector of St. Luke's Church in New Haven during these years, Holly also took every opportunity he could to "stir up an interest by tongue, pen, and the press, in the contemplated mission." The activity was profitable. The Bishops of Ohio and Connecticut gave substantial backing to the promotion of the enterprise, and in 1861 Holly and his party left New Haven with promises of aid for the new mission.

#### HAITI'S PRESIDENT IS A SPONSOR

WITHIN two days of their arrival at Port-au-Prince, Holly carried out his first official act as the priest of this new Episcopal congregation in Haiti. With the President of Haiti acting as one of the sponsors, he baptized a child who had been born during the trip. This was the President's earnest show of interest in the new-

comers who had answered his invitation to find a home in Haiti. The interest did not end, however, with this single gesture. President Geffrard invited the company of emigrants to settle on his own land some three miles from the city, and placed the spacious hall of his private mansion at Mr. Holly's disposal, to be used for the holding of the public services of the Church on the Lord's Day.

#### A FEVER BROKE OUT

ALTHOUGH the welcome that was directly extended to them was extremely encouraging, the new settlers were soon confronted with a more terrifying prospect than the fear of being strangers in a strange land. A fever broke out among them, and within a very short period claimed the lives of forty-three of the company. Holly describes it vividly:

. . . We were all naturally much elated at the very encouraging reception we had met with in such high places. But in order that we might not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, an overruling Providence, higher than the princes of this world, saw fit to "visit us with trouble and to bring distress upon us." A destructive fever broke out among the colonists, and in the short period of six months death had claimed forty-three of the company as its prey. As many as four persons in one day had been committed to their last resting place.

The leader himself was not spared the suffering. He had been accompanied on this journey to Haiti by eight members of his family. By February 1, 1862, exactly nine months after the date of departure from New Haven, the family of nine had been reduced to three: Holly and his two small sons. For many such a blow would have been too crushing for an effective recovery,

but this young Negro priest accepted it "with resignation to His blessed will." Holly kept his spirits high in order that he could minister effectually to a flock whose ranks had been seriously depleted.

The consequences of the contagion did not come to an end with the restoration of health to those whose lives were spared. Fear and anxiety spread quickly among the remaining sixty-eight. Those who had fallen ill but recovered their health felt discouraged; others, who had been spared feared another epidemic. Holly expected the worst and it came quickly. A majority of the colonists returned to the United States, leaving only about twenty who had decided "to consecrate the lives God had spared to His service, in bearing testimony to the Gospel among the people to whom in His Name they had come."

Although grateful for the grant of land that had been given them, Holly and his companions realized that its situation was unhealthy. To avoid another siege of fever the group divided, some moving into the city; others remaining on the farm. Almost at once an American resident of the city offered the use of a large hall free of charge for church services, on the condition that work would be begun immediately. Needless to say, Holly quickly accepted the offer, and on January 4, 1863, the first service was held in Port-au-Prince.

In 1862 Holly returned to the United States in time to be present at the General Convention, hoping to persuade the Foreign Committee of the Board of Missions to provide a stipend that would enable him to rent a house in Port-au-Prince in order to live near his work. The plea was eloquent, and although it did not fall on deaf ears the Board was unable to provide the

desired assistance. Holly was not discouraged. He sought other organizations which might help meet the needs in Haiti. When the American Church Missionary Society promised him assistance, he returned to Haiti, renting a house in the city just a month after the hall had been provided for the holding of church services.

#### A PARISH GROWS IN PORT-AU-PRINCE

FROM his rented house Holly ministered faithfully to his small congregation, praying, guiding, organizing, until in a matter of only a few months—on Whitsunday, May 15, 1863—Holy Trinity Parish, Port-au-Prince, was received into union with the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the United States. Bishop Brownell, then Presiding Bishop, chose the Bishop of Delaware to act as his commissary and supervise the work of the congregation in Haiti.

Bishop Lee wasted no time. By November he visited Haiti in order to survey the work. Submitting a lengthy report on his return, he noted the confirmation of twenty-six candidates. His comments continued:

The Rev. J. T. Holly has made a good beginning. I was very favorably impressed with what I saw of him and of his labors. He has been working with zeal, prudence, and perseverance, and has shown remarkable energy in so debilitating a climate. It will not be worthwhile, however, to prosecute the Mission without suitable buildings. A convenient and appropriate church is a *sine qua non*, and accommodation for schools and residence, for one missionary, at least, is of the first importance.

With the recognition now given by the episcopal visitor, Holly redoubled his efforts to establish a permanent place of worship and to extend the Church's

influence further in the Republic. Small congregations were begun in areas remote from Port-au-Prince, a lay ministry was developed to lead these groups, and Holly undertook the tremendous task of supervising the whole work for the next few years. In 1866 the success was such that the Foreign Committee of the Board of Missions accepted responsibility for the work of the Haitian Mission, and George Burgess, Bishop of Maine, was sent to make another episcopal visitation.

#### STEPS TOWARD A HAITIAN MINISTRY

BISHOP BURGESS' reports excited the American Church with a picture of a sturdy and expanding Mission in Haiti. Vocations to the ministry had been aroused among the Haitians by Holly's preaching and teaching, and the first move in the building of a strong local ministry had been made. In one of his letters Bishop Burgess reported:

Let me state that at Cape Haytien, on Sunday the eleventh of March . . . I ordained the Rev. St. Denis Bauduy, whom I had previously confirmed, to the order of deacon, and that I propose, God willing, to ordain him to the priesthood. Mr. Bauduy is a man of color and has been for many years a laborer among the Wesleyans, by whom he was ordained in England.

This was only the beginning. Subsequent letters show that the Bishop advanced Mr. Bauduy to the priesthood on Easter of 1866, and on that same day also admitted Julien Alexandre to the diaconate. Applications were received from six other Haitians to be accepted as candidates for Holy Orders, and within a short time several of them were sent to the United States to be trained at the Mission House in Philadel-

phia. News of the Bishop's visit brought a stir in localities that had already been touched by Holly's missionary activity, and three separate groups of people petitioned the Bishop to establish missions in their towns. The first Convocation of the Church in Haiti, held in 1866, saw the desires of the petitioners fulfilled with the new parishes of *Bon Berger*, Cabaret, *Saint Esprit*, Cap Haitien, and *Saint Sauveur*, Cayes, all represented along with *Sainte Trinite*, Port-au-Prince. These four congregations were the founding parishes of the Episcopal Church in Haiti.

The years between the visits of Bishop Burgess and the next episcopal visitation in 1872 found the Church growing rapidly. The annual meetings of Convocation welcomed a constant flow of new parishes into union with it, and it is clear that the zeal and ministry of Holly was largely responsible for the increase. In a letter written in 1868 we catch a glimpse of his labors:

Passed the day at Jeremie, *en route* for Cayes. . . . There was no means to circulate notice of my arrival in time to have a service. . . . Sunday, spent the day in visiting members from house to house, engaging them in religious conversation, and making known to them the work we proposed by God's grace to do in Haiti. . . . But they are wanting in that valiancy of faith which distinguished St. Peter and St. Paul, to do and dare all. . . . I endeavoured to speak to them in the full catholic and apostolic spirit of the Gospel so admirably enshrined in the standards of our Church, so as to arouse them from their spiritual lethargy. . . . I have reason to believe that something has been done by my testimony to arouse those brethren at Jeremie to a fuller consideration of our claims as an evangelical Church, and a juster appreciation of the apostolic work we propose to do among them.

Holly's belief seems to have been well grounded. Within a short time a congregation developed at Jere-

mie, and in 1873 the Parish of *St. Luc* was founded there.

As the work expanded, the farsighted missionary never lost his concern for the preparation of Haitian clergy for the oversight of new missions. A steady stream of candidates was sent back to the United States to be educated and ordained. During the period of their training lay readers were placed at strategic points to carry on the work in the congregations, and from these men further vocations developed. On every side the Church's work seemed more and more promising, and the need for local episcopal oversight was clearly felt. From time to time pleas had been made by the Church in Haiti to have a missionary bishop appointed, and the Haitian Convocation made a formal request in 1871, "praying that a foreign missionary bishop, to be resident in Haiti should be chosen, set apart, and provided for."

It was then that the Bishop of Western New York was deputed by the General Convention as Bishop-in-charge of Haiti and was requested to visit and carefully to inspect the mission field. On November 22, 1872, he landed at Port-au-Prince to begin an intensive visitation, estimating the potentialities of the Mission as well as providing the anxiously awaited episcopal ministrations.

Bishop Coxe was deeply impressed by what he saw. Holly had called upon him immediately to consecrate a new church in Port-au-Prince erected to the memory of Bishop Burgess, to confirm fifty-three candidates, to ordain six deacons and five priests, and to preside at a special session of Convocation. Coxe's tour of the mission areas convinced him that the de-

sire of the community for a bishop should be fulfilled. The time seemed right for a fuller ministry to be exercised by a Church of the Anglican Communion in Haiti.

#### A BISHOP FOR HAITI

WHEN the General Convention met in New York in October 1874, Bishop Coxe, representing the Board of Missions, moved that a bishop be elected and consecrated for the Island of Haiti. The House of Bishops, unanimous in its approval, shortly afterwards passed a resolution:

That this House does hereby give its consent to the consecration of the Reverend James Theodore Holly, D.D., as Bishop of Haiti, and requests the Presiding Bishop to take order for the same.

The Church for whom he had labored nearly twenty years had now seen fit to honor Holly with its highest office. His leadership and dedication had not gone unnoticed by those who were soon to be his brother bishops, and their vote of approval bore witness to the faith that they had in his ability to fill the office of bishop. But the consecration of Holly was more than just the establishment of a new missionary episcopate and a show of faith in the man himself; it also marked a milestone in the history of the American Church. James Theodore Holly became the first Negro in the American line of episcopal succession. On November 8, 1874, at his consecration at Grace Church in New York City, Holly was sent forth to Haiti by the American Church as Bishop Crowther had been sent to Africa ten years before by the Church of England. The Anglican Communion had set new roots in another land of the Negro people, and the prayers of

men and women of both races alike went up to God that the new Church might flourish.

Not only was this the beginning of the Negro episcopate in the American Church, but it was also the beginning of the independent Haitian Church. Shortly after the bishops voiced their approval of the consecration of Holly, a covenant between the General Convention of the American Church and the Convocation of the Haitian Church established an independent Church in Haiti. Its government was to be in the hands of a board consisting of the new Haitian bishop and four bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, until such time as Haiti had three of its own bishops. The Church in the United States recognized this community as an independent branch of the Anglican Communion, responsible for its own welfare with the promise of assistance from the mother Church during the years of need. At the Lambeth Conference of 1878 the same recognition was accorded by the Church of England.

#### CONDITIONS FACING THE CHURCH IN HAITI

THE development of the Church in Haiti was slow. No blame, however, attaches to the new bishop, the clergy, or the members of the Church. A whole complex of attitudes and events that followed the return of Bishop Holly to Haiti affected the Church's growth.

The state of Haiti was no worse in 1874—in fact, was somewhat improved—over what it had been in 1861 when Holly first led his flock to that country. But while the thirteen years had shown some advances, there was still a great deal to be desired. During his visitation, Bishop Coxe had looked over the situation with great interest, and upon his return spoke

of some of the stumbling blocks that lay in the path of the new Orthodox and Apostolic Church of Haiti. He wrote:

When our mission in Haiti was first established it was thought it would be primarily important to the white inhabitants. . . . But the whites are not the missionaries by any means which we might desire them to be. Bishop Burgess said . . . they are not poor, some of them are wealthy, and can support a chapel for themselves. . . . Since the date of Bishop Burgess' visit, six years ago, Mr. Holly has thrown his chief energies into the work of evangelizing these poor natives.

The word "poor" hardly reveals the real condition of those to whom Holly had turned his ministrations. It is true that they were poverty-stricken in so far as material possessions were concerned, but worse than that, large numbers were forced to live almost as savages. The French Revolution had made them free men, but as Bishop Coxe said further, "They were scattered over the country, and in the mountain districts, and finally returned to their primitive African condition." These lost sheep Bishop Holly continued to seek, but although they helped to fill the ranks of the Church they could do little themselves to further its cause because of their poverty and ignorance.

#### OPPOSING RELIGIOUS FORCES

HAD the difficulties been entirely in the social structure of the country the carrying of the Gospel to even the most remote and isolated points would not have been as difficult for Holly and his clergy as it proved to be. A serious complication, however, was the presence of two opposing religious forces already entrenched in the island. The first of these was Roman Catholicism,

brought to Haiti by the French pioneers and colonists. Officially recognized as the state religion it enjoyed a number of privileges, though losing thereby much of its effectiveness. At the same time, however, the clerical members of that Church sought jealously to guard the position that they had already gained. Many of them were openly opposed to the new bishop and his flock. Writing in a publication prepared for American readers, Holly described just one of several hostile acts on the part of the Roman Catholic clergy:

Several accessions have been made to the congregation at Gros Morne . . . by persons withdrawing from the Roman Catholic Church and becoming members of ours in that locality. This has so incensed the Romish priests of the parish that they attempted to organize a persecution of our congregation by hiring some low-bred persons to stone our members while assembled for service Easter Monday.

Fortunately the government's policy of religious toleration was more than just a paper arrangement, and the offenders in such cases were brought to justice whenever possible.

#### THE RELIGION OF VODOO

THE second barrier, however, was much more formidable. Although not as efficiently organized as Roman Catholicism, its strength and appeal was unimaginable. This was the religion of Voodoo, the primitive religion of the natives themselves, which had been brought to Haiti from their homeland in Africa. It was still alive and as much a part of the every day life of the Haitian native as Christianity had been to the Italian of the Middle Ages. As was practiced by the natives it could only be considered fearful and dangerous, and the impression made on those meeting it for the

first time is clearly reflected in the remarks of Bishop Coxe:

The religious condition, then, of these people is that of barbarism. Although many of them have been baptized in their infancy, yet they worship the spirit of evil; not because they admire or love the evil spirit, but because their ancestors have done so before them, and because they wish to propitiate him. . . . They dread the white man's God, however, and seem to think that baptism keeps them from the power of charms and incantations which one family is continually using against another. . . . In their mountain cov-erts they still practice their fearful rites. For it seems that their superstition demands that once a year a sacrifice should be made to the infernal spirit, and the most acceptable sacrifice is human life. I was horrified to learn from our missionary [J. T. Holly] that in Haiti cannibalism not only exists today, but is very prevalent in many parts of the island. It is not cannibalism which takes life for the sake of food. It is cannibalism of religious superstition.

Not always so dramatic as Bishop Coxe's description, this was the popular folk religion, and a dynamic part of all Haitian life. The serious problems that were met by Bishop Holly were usually not caused by the most extreme form of Voodoo with its violence, but with milder forms that were constantly adapting themselves to the symbols and ceremonies of Christianity. Voodoo had done this for centuries in its contact with Roman Catholicism, and thus within the pagan religion itself could be found almost all the elements of Christianity in a perverted form.

Bishop Holly was unable to show the same cold toleration that the Roman clergy exhibited toward Voodoo. They believed that Christian teaching would ultimately do away with pagan practices. Holly, however, would not stand for such an approach. Both he and his clergy were of a reforming temperament, and

their consciences would not permit them to allow the slightest vestige of the superstitious cult to remain among their congregations. The result of this strict attitude was seen in the small numbers of adherents to the new Church. Growth was extremely slow in Holly's episcopate.

Slow growth, however, does not mean complete defeat, and beneath the small figures one can discover elements of permanent achievement. In each of Bishop Holly's reports, from 1874 until his death, there can be found some mention of successful attempts to turn individuals from the superstitions of Voodoo to membership in the Haitian Church. The battle was often hard and long before these Haitians were convinced, but it is to the credit of Bishop Holly and his clergy that when they finally won them over the victory was complete. Following is a description of such conversions and its evangelistic result:

Eight mystagogues, or heathen priests . . . have been led to abandon the practice of those superstitions . . . and humbly submit to Christ by the obedience of faith! Moreover, those converts, unwilling to content themselves with the good things thus obtained for their own souls, are, on the contrary, active in searching out other souls in those mountains who are still sitting in darkness, in order to bring them also to the feet of Christ.

#### PROTESTANTISM IN HAITI

THERE was a third religious element present in the island when Holly arrived, but through the years its strength had waned and almost disappeared. This was composed of the various Protestant bodies that had been at work some years prior to the entrance of the Episcopal Church. Almost from the outset of his or-

ganized work in Haiti, Holly had planned a program of co-operation with any Christian bodies that were in the island, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant. Such co-operation with the former proved impossible, and by 1878 an entirely unexpected situation had arisen in relation to the latter. Holly found his success inspiring those groups which had withdrawn from Haiti during the intervening years. In a letter written in that year, he described this process of rejuvenation:

The Wesleyan Committee at London which began to withdraw its laborers in 1864, discouraged at the reorganization of Romanism, finding that the Church had withstood papalism and made headway seemed to be provoked to a godly jealousy, at our success, and sent two new laborers into this field in 1876. . . . Thus returning to their work after a suspension of twelve years.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States, which established a congregation here in 1824 on the arrival of the first colonial emigrants from the United States, ceased to care for this congregation since 1835 leaving it in the hands of a local ministry. In 1877, moved by our success here, that body sent a missionary pastor to take up its work again in Haiti.

The Baptists whose pastor withdrew from here in 1870, are now educating a young Haitian at Hamilton College, New York, for the ministry, who is to take up their suspended work here & carry it forward. . . .

Thus our work has inspired the failing hosts of Protestantism with courage and caused them to make another grand rally against the errors of Romanism and the superstitious paganism still extant and rampant in Haiti.

Within two years the bishop's tone had changed, largely because of the approach taken by the returning groups. Whereas at the beginning of his work in Haiti Holly had determined not to compete with Christian groups already there, the newly arriving mission-

aries were not willing to reciprocate. They began work in areas where Holly's clergy were already established, creating friction within congregations, and causing factions to develop in some of Holly's missions. But Holly's tolerant courtesy gradually brought about harmony among all Christian workers, and ten years later, following a fire that destroyed every one of Bishop Holly's mission buildings in Port-au-Prince, he was able to state in his annual report:

We owe it to the Christian kindness of the Methodist congregation here . . . that we have been able to keep up our nine o'clock Sunday morning service in their church edifice, which they have kindly placed at our disposal for this purpose.

Had Holly and his fellow-workers only to cope with religious rivalries the Church would undoubtedly have progressed more rapidly than it did. But adversity took many forms. From the founding of the Mission in 1861 to the Bishop's death in 1911, a series of disasters frustrated the forward movement of the work and threatened constantly to annihilate the energies and resources of the independent Church. Fire, epidemics, and revolutions were constant threats throughout Holly's fifty years of activity.

### THE FIRE OF 1873

It is said that the city of Port-au-Prince has been consumed by fire every seven years, and from the records it would seem that this was not far from the truth. The fire of 1866 was mild compared to those that followed. In 1873, shortly after Bishop Coxe had consecrated Holy Trinity Church, Holly was forced to send a tragic letter to the Board of Missions:

It becomes my sad and painful duty to inform you that a terrible conflagration that broke out in a frame tenement situated about a quarter block from our church premises, spread with the rapidity of lightning, wafted by a strong wind, setting towards us, until our mission buildings were reached and parsonage, church and school house were all laid in one heap of ashes in about the space of one-half hour. . . . The greater portion of all we possessed perished.

Led by Holly, the congregation raised funds for rebuilding, and within six months another church had been erected. Although several conflagrations broke out in the city in the following years, it was not until 1888 that the cry "Fire!" was again sounded near church property. This time, however, the whole of the property went up in smoke and a new church was not erected until 1895. Holly had worked for the construction of a steel and brick building that might hold out against any further disasters. In 1908, however, the final heartbreak came. The last incendiary calamity during the bishop's lifetime leveled more than one quarter of the city of Port-au-Prince, again including the Church of the Holy Trinity in its toll. In the three remaining years of his life, the bishop did not see the church rebuilt.

#### HEALING THE BODY

IN any country where the physical conditions are as primitive and undeveloped as they were in Haiti, the health problem is always a grave one. Accepting this, it was Bishop Holly's understanding that "healing the body as well as saving the soul was made the Gospel work of our Lord and His Apostles," and through the years many opportunities were presented to him to put his belief into practice. Epidemics were a tragic fea-

ture of life there, and in his report of 1878 the Bishop sadly commented that "The Baptism of Infants, the Visitation of the Sick, and the Burial of the Dead among this class of persons here are offices that almost wholly fall to our lot to perform."

The sincerity of the bishop's belief that the healing of the body was as much of a responsibility as the salvation of men's souls was proven in the activity of the medical mission which was begun in 1889. Dr. Alonzo P. Holly, one of the bishop's sons, trained as a physician in the United States, opened a dispensary in Gonaives. Within a year he was able to report the treatment of more than 550 patients. The bishop was extremely hopeful and sought to expand the work. In 1895, five sons of the Haitian clergy, graduates either of medical schools in the United States or of the Port-au-Prince medical faculty, were ready to offer their services to the Church. By 1898 a clinic and dispensary had been built, and a regular circuit of the mission stations was being made by several physicians. Bishop Holly could proudly take credit for a pioneer work in meeting the needs of his Haitian people.

#### REVOLUTION AND TURMOIL

THE third grim and persistent foe did not bring destruction on the Church directly, but its continuous effects impeded the Church's progress at every turn. Almost without cessation from 1876 to 1889 successive revolutions and political upheavals unnerved the country. Time and time again the Bishop lost communication with various of his missions as the rebels captured or destroyed the localities in which they were situated. Although never directly mistreated or perse-

cuted, Holly's clergy did not escape the ravages of these hostilities. Bombarding drove them and their families from their homes. Their property was lost. In some instances they were forced to dwell for a month in the mountains away from the open conflict. Throughout the hostilities, however, the Bishop and his clergy were held in respect, and Holly could admit that "no circumstance has come to my attention, by which either of the combatants have interfered with religious exercises of our missionaries."

In spite of the persistent difficulties, advances were made in several areas which had a lasting effect on the Church's work in the Republic. The significant control that was exercised by the Roman Catholic Church over the education of Haitian youth, led Bishop Holly to extend the work of the Episcopal Church into the sphere of education. In this area and that of the medical mission the greatest achievements of Holly's labors are to be found. As early as 1880, he was able to report three private schools under his personal patronage in Port-au-Prince, and of schools in the parishes at Cayes, Jeremie, Gros Morne, and Trianon. By 1881 a normal school had been put into operation; in 1882 an elementary school was begun in the capital; and in 1884 a farm school was opened just outside the city. By the close of Bishop Holly's administration in 1911, the Church was employing fifty-four teachers throughout Haiti.

#### FIFTY YEARS IN HAITI

THE year 1911 marked the fiftieth year of service that the bishop had given to the Church in Haiti, and the thirty-seventh of his episcopate. When he had arrived in 1861 as a young priest, the work in the island was

entirely new. In 1874 when he was elected bishop, his staff included six priests and four deacons. He was then responsible for a flock of nearly one thousand souls. In 1911 there were twelve priests and two deacons, and the number of members was more than double that of 1874. His fifty years had been indeed notable, both because of the growth of the Haitian Church, and because of the example of his devoted life. When on March 13, 1911, Bishop Holly entered his final rest his inspiration was withdrawn from his flock. The Church had struggled throughout its entire existence, relying always on the strength it could draw from its chief pastor. With his death, the problems it faced seemed overwhelming, and a petition was prepared requesting the American Church to accept the Church in Haiti as a missionary district. But Holly's spirit was carried into the new status; the foundation laid by him has become the sturdy base for the active and ever-growing missionary district of the Episcopal Church in Haiti today.

To quote from a recent brief description of the Church's work in Haiti:

The situation among the Negroes of the French or Creole-speaking Republic of Haiti, however, is entirely different . . . there the Episcopal Church maintains its second largest missionary district, with over fourteen thousand communicants and more than three times that number of baptized persons. Significantly too, nearly all its thirty clergy and hundred or more lay workers are Haitians. . . . Everywhere Holly's original foundations have been expanded, and the evangelistic advance is steady and encouraging. The almost completely native character of the Haitian Church is both the heritage of its unique past and the basis of its future promise.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dawley, *The Episcopal Church and Its Work*, pp. 195-6.

## For Further Reading

*The Episcopal Church in the United States: 1789-1931*, by James Thayer Addison (New York, Scribners, 1951).

*The Episcopal Church and Its Work*, by Powel Mills Dawley (Greenwich, Seabury Press, 1955).

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